

Hanford Advisory Board instrumental in decision-making

In the 1990s, the U.S. Department of Energy at Hanford conducted a series of public-participation forums to help get early and meaningful input on cleanup decisions from its many and diverse stakeholders. These forums were the result of two forces at work — citizens' insistence on having a role in making Hanford cleanup decisions, and DOE's willingness to open its decision-making processes to public scrutiny.

To acquire advice and recommendations from its stakeholders, DOE created the Hanford Advisory Board in 1994. The board includes representatives of local and regional governments, Native American tribes, business interests, the State of Oregon, environmental organizations, public-interest groups and the general public.

"The government makes better decisions when it hears ideas and concerns from its citizens," said Marla Marvin, director of Communications for the DOE Richland Operations Office. "The HAB is Hanford's most valuable public-participation forum and definitely helps us make better decisions."

HAB members view the board as the "keeper" of the Tri-Party Agreement signed in 1989 by the State of Washington Department of Ecology, the Department of Energy and the Environmental Protection Agency. The board works to ensure that the Tri-Party Agreement remains a credible document.

When Hanford recently issued the *Accelerated Cleanup Performance Management Plan for Accelerated Cleanup of the Hanford Site*, the HAB was thrust into quick action. "The board has been responsive and timely in responding to urgent requests from DOE for input on the Hanford Performance Management Plan," said DOE-RL manager Keith Klein. "They provided us good insight and solid advice to improve the plan."

When the Hanford Advisory Board and the Tri-Party agencies compared priority lists for this fiscal year, they found the two lists were nearly identical, demonstrating consensus concerning the DOE work that will benefit from HAB input and advice. These are a few of the issues the HAB is focusing on this year:

- Accelerating closure of high-level waste tanks
- Exploring alternative technologies for immobilizing low-activity tank waste
- Establishing an integrated strategy for Hanford groundwater
- Accelerating retrieval and shipment of several types of waste
- Accelerating cleanup of Hanford's central plateau
- Beginning risk-assessment processes
- Linking acceleration plans to project baselines.

Stakeholders, including tribal governments, recognize that DOE is responsible for the final decisions, but the advisory board helps the agencies understand the public's perspective. Experience at Hanford has proven again and again that key cleanup decisions made openly and with full public participation produce not only better decisions, but also decisions that can be implemented.

For more information, visit the Hanford Advisory Board's Web site at <http://www.hanford.gov/boards/hab/index.htm>. ■